The RSA and the Digital Latin Library: History of the Project

In 2012, members of the Renaissance Society of America, the American Philological Association (now the Society for Classical Studies), and the Medieval Academy of America applied for and received funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a planning grant to explore the possibility of creating a new resource for scholars and readers of Latin texts of all eras and genres. The working group developed the idea for the Digital Latin Library (DLL), an Internet resource where people with varying levels of interest and expertise in Latin could find, read, discuss, study, teach, edit, and annotate Latin texts, whether for personal use or for open access, peer reviewed publication by one of the three learned societies affiliated with the project. The project is hosted by the University of Oklahoma.

An Online Public Research Library for Latin

The launch of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA) demonstrated the power of a Linked Open Data (LOD) approach to making information from disparate sources available through a single point of access. Instead of keeping copies of documents and files on its own servers, the DPLA provides ready access to collections in hundreds of other libraries all at the same time. Because those institutions already use commonly accepted standards for their data and metadata, the DPLA can harvest that information and make it available in a single, uniform interface.

The DLL aims to do for Latin what the DPLA has done for materials in public libraries across the United States: provide a single point of access to texts and resources (e.g., images of inscriptions and manuscripts, reference works, tools for analysis, etc.). However, a major challenge for the DLL is that the Latin projects already in existence do not have much in common other than that they are on the Internet. That is why the DLL working group devoted a significant amount of the planning phase to convening representatives from some of the other projects to discuss and develop a metadata standard for describing authors and works in a way that addresses the unique challenges of ancient resources such as fragmentary texts, spurious works, florilegia, the myriad anonymous authors, and the intricate relationships between manuscripts. Using and constantly improving and extending this metadata standard, the DLL will be not only a portal to Latin texts, but also a source of stable URIs for authors and texts that other projects can use for their own purposes.

Since existing catalogues of classical and late antique literature (e.g., the Perseus Catalogue and the Classical Works Knowledge Base) do not plan to cover material beyond the eighth century CE, a mission of the DLL will be to expand and extend the coverage to authors and texts through the middle ages and into the modern era. By establishing LOD authority records for authors and works from all eras and genres

of Latin texts, the DLL will provide the digital infrastructure for reaching the admittedly asymptotic goal of providing a single point of access to all Latin texts in existence.

An Open Access Publisher of Critical Editions and Commentaries

The DLL will also collaborate with the RSA, SCS, and MAA to publish The Library of Digital Latin Texts. These texts and commentaries will gradually become not only the centerpiece of the DLL, but the standard editions for scholarly use, since they will provide much more information about texts and their transmission than traditional print editions can.

The Library of Digital Latin Texts is in many ways the boldest part of this entire project, since it will be a step forward for textual criticism and critical editions. Until recently, none of the Latin texts available online had a critical apparatus, which meant they were of limited use to scholars. In the case of a printed edition, the traditional format makes economic sense: publishers are reluctant to sacrifice room on the page for something that only specialists will understand. Free of those constraints, editions published in *The Library of Digital Latin Texts* will have an enhanced critical apparatus capable of far more than listing variant readings and conjectures. Editors will be able to explain *in situ* their arguments for or against certain readings, calling upon all of the resources of the web (e.g., descriptions and/or images of the manuscript in question, links to similar passages in other texts) for support. Because the texts will be readable and queryable by both humans and machines, even the sophisticated word-searches that scholars have been able to perform with existing tools will pale by comparison, since the robust techniques of visual data analysis will finally become available to scholars of Latin texts.

For example, using DLL's visualization tools it will be possible to display annotations in the traditional format of a printed edition, but it will also be possible to filter the information so that only variants of a certain type are displayed. The most important aspect of all of this is that the texts will also be useful outside of the DLL's visualization environment, since they will be encoded according to a [standard set of guidelines](). These guidelines are a customization of the Text Encoding Initiative's well-known standard for using XML to encode textual data.

Indeed, the project has already proven to be fertile ground for cross-cutting, collaborative research. From the outset, one concern has been to break down the traditional boundaries that separate classicists, medievalists, and neo-Latinists to foster a greater appreciation of the rich, centuries-long history of Latin as the archetypal lingua franca for interdisciplinary, scholarly communication. Similarly, DLL will re-imagine the very notion of scholarship to include humanities computing as a rich and vital field with immense possibilities for making original contributions to the field. Accordingly, the planning phase brought together scholars whose work runs the gamut from ancient to early modern texts and whose expertise covers everything from textual criticism to graphical user interface development. In the

end, the planning phase demonstrated what could happen when scholars cease to work only within our respective bailiwicks and begin to appreciate the richness of Latin from ancient to modern, from traditional scholarship to the most recent developments in technology.

As for peer review, this is where the three learned societies affiliated with this project enter the picture. They will review submissions to the DLL through their long-standing processes for evaluating their other potential publications. At this level, the concern will be whether the publication evinces a high standard of scholarly work. The director of the DLL will assist the various publications and research boards in assessing the technical side of the submission so that they can focus on its scholarly merits, just as they would for a submission intended for publication in print. If a project passes that test, it can be recommended for publication on the DLL under the aegis of one of the learned societies. The DLL board, made up of members from all three learned societies and the director of the DLL, will evaluate the submission for compliance with the DLL's technical standards and make the final decision to publish the material. All materials will then be published under an open license for maximum accessibility.

Post-publication review is equally important, so an aim of the DLL will be to advocate, alongside the RSA, SCS, and MAA for more inclusion of digital scholarship in traditional review publications.

A Resource for Training and Educating the Next Generation of Editors

However new and exciting the technology of the DLL might be, it will not sweep aside the editorial techniques and standards for publication established over centuries of practice and scholarly debate. Rather, the DLL will provide an outlet for realizing the full potential of those techniques and standards through a richer medium for reading and understanding texts and their idiosyncrasies. But the DLL will not reach its own full potential without the participation of scholars now and in the future, so it is vital to provide training and assurance that their work will undergo review by their peers both before and after publication.

Accordingly, the DLL has pursued two initiatives to support both the educational and scholarly missions of the DLL. First, the DLL produced a [series of instructional videos](#) on the subjects of textual criticism and digital humanities. These videos became the first additions to the DLL's openly available reference collection, for use by individuals or for course materials. Second, the [DLL held a seminar](#) on the theory and practice of scholarly editing in the 21st century, also [hosting a workshop](#) to teach beginners about encoding Latin texts according to the DLL's guidelines. The goals of these initiatives have been to recruit both veteran scholars and aspiring editors to work on editions for the Library of Digital Latin Texts; to promote instruction in textual criticism, a subject vital to the profession, but rarely a focus of graduate education; to raise awareness of the DLL and its potential for transforming Latin studies; and finally, to keep the momentum going for the DLL project.

For more information

For more information, please explore the information pages at
https://digitallatin.org. There you can find more information about the project's
timeline, mission, goals, and personnel, among other things.